



9 PARK DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

OVERVIEW

This chapter outlines some of the development issues associated with planning new park facilities at Chimney Rock State Park. Locations for day use areas, visitor facilities, and park staff facilities were examined and the opportunities and constraints weighed for each. In *Chapter 10: Recommendations*, many of these issues are addressed with recommendations.

VISITOR CENTER LOCATION

There is a substantial lack of access to large areas of flat, developable space within Chimney Rock State Park. The steep elevations and diverse topography that produce such tremendous views also limit low-impact options for facility development. Among the 4,531 acres that exist in Chimney Rock State Park, only about 3 percent are feasible for developed park facilities. With the exception of the Meadows, there are no other flat areas on currently-owned park property that offer the space necessary to accommodate a visitor center, parking, and vehicle access. Other sites within the study area that were considered are explained below.

1) THE ORCHARDS

The Orchards, an abandoned apple orchard located at the top of Chimney Rock Mountain, provides a substantial amount of flat space. Views to the gorge are afforded by the high elevation. Despite the opportunities, there are numerous constraints. The Orchards proposal was not well-received at the public open house. Participants were concerned about the environmental impacts, expense, and aesthetics. Roadway access to this area is constrained by a private, unpaved jeep trail and currently requires a utility vehicle to navigate. Improving this corridor to public roadway standards will require substantial rerouting and reconstruction. Road construction will adversely impact the landscape and surrounding wildlife. Additionally, a travel time more than 45 minutes will be necessary for visitors driving from the existing park entrance.



The Orchards is feasible for the development of park facilities, however road access is the limiting constraint.



2) CAMPGROUNDS NEAR LAKE LURE TOWN HALL

Conveniently located just south of U.S. Route 64/74A, across from Lake Lure Town Hall, is a tract of land that was previously operated as a private campground. The tract totals 16 acres, with two neglected ponds and five acres of flat developable space. The former campgrounds are still privately owned, and would require acquisition by the State of North Carolina.

While this location is feasible geographically, operational issues pose constraints if a visitor center were constructed in this location. The Rocky Broad River and U.S. Route 64/74A are barriers currently dividing the park, creating a disconnect between parklands north and south of these areas. The goal of creating a park core will be difficult to accomplish with a visitor center at this location.

Visitor parking will be a major issue from a capacity and management standpoint. Of the 16 acres on the tract, only five acres are actually considered developable for a low impact facility. Much of this space will be used for park facilities and an entrance road, with a marginal amount remaining for visitor parking.

Finally, it may be challenging for the Town of Lake Lure, Village of Chimney Rock, Hickory Nut Gorge representatives and Chimney Rock State Park staff to target each visitor's experience with multiple operations occurring in a shared-use facility. Having a separate location solely for park visitors will better distinguish the park visitor experience.

3) LAKE LURE TOWN CENTER

The Town of Lake Lure is reviving landscape architect E.S. Draper's 1926 plan for the Lake Lure Town Center. The Town Center Plan was envisioned to contain two retail buildings, a hotel and a bus station. The Lake Lure Inn and Arcade were constructed and remain in use to this day. Consideration was given to locating the proposed Chimney Rock State Park Visitor Center within the town center. Under the proposal, the state park would share space with the Town of Lake Lure, Village of Chimney Rock, and other tourism interests in a regional visitor center. The N.C. Division of State Parks and Recreation staff determined that a shared environment would not satisfy the operational requirements of a visitor center.

The division does support working closely with the Town of Lake Lure, Chimney Rock Village and other agencies and organizations to establish a regional tourism center within the town center that could provide residents and visitors with important information about venues, attractions, activities and events.



The original 1926 Lake Lure Town Center Plan



RECREATIONAL ACCESS FACILITIES

Providing visitor access to the natural opportunities offered at Chimney Rock State Park requires careful planning in order to balance development and use with natural resource protection in or near these areas. Chimney Rock State Park is largely undeveloped, which makes it particularly attractive to conservation and nature-based recreation enthusiasts. By renovating existing park areas where feasible and providing new facilities, visitation will inevitably increase. Dispersing visitors through multiple day use areas will limit impact and potential overuse.

Ideal locations for day use recreation are those that have flat, suitable space to accommodate parking for up to 50 vehicles, existing roadway access, the ability to connect visitors to north and south Chimney Rock State Park, and are outside significant natural heritage area boundaries. Day use areas should be located away from residences and neighborhoods where possible to minimize land use incompatibilities. Operational access should also be available for efficient park staff maintenance and patrol. Land for day use areas, much like the Visitor Center, is very limited within the study area.

Using existing public roadways, access opportunities were examined along U.S. Route 64/74A, Boys Camp Road, Buffalo Creek Road, Shumont Road, Sugarloaf Mountain Road, and World's Edge Road. Travel time from the park entrance is a significant issue (ranging from 15 minutes to one hour) as is existing roadway conditions and adjacent land uses. Many roadways will need improvements if used for public access to park day use areas. With the exception of U.S. Route 64/74A, Boys Camp Road, Buffalo Creek Road, and World's Edge Road, day use areas along existing roadways are limited to these areas only within Chimney Rock State Park. The justification is explained on the following pages.

SHUMONT ROAD

Shumont Road connects with N.C. Highway 9 approximately two miles north of U.S. Route 64/74A. Shumont Road is a narrow mountain road that climbs in elevation and winds through residential properties. The roadway is paved before it terminates a few hundred feet west of Eagle Rock. South of Shumont Road and west of Shumont Mountain, an 84-acre parcel of land was studied for its potential to serve the northwestern region of the park. It's suitable topography, available space, and potential connections to Shumont Road were opportunities for consideration of a day use area.

Further study indicates that a day use area at Shumont Mountain will require substantial improvements to Shumont Road and additional land acquisition. Despite the potential connections provided by Shumont Road, public access will need to be further developed if a day use area is proposed. This connection would require easements across private property or the acquisition of property adjacent to Shumont Road. Also, adjacent landowners expressed concerns about current trespassing issues being exacerbated by the proximity of a public access area to their homes.



*State park boundary gate
near the end of Shumont
Road*



SUGARLOAF MOUNTAIN ROAD

The majority of developable land along Sugarloaf Mountain Road is privately owned. Where park boundary intersects with the roadway, topography and natural features limit the space required for day use area facilities. Sugarloaf Mountain Road is also east of a significant natural heritage area known as Cloven Cliffs. At the end of the roadway is a small community of homeowners. By increasing park traffic in this area with the introduction of a day use area, the privacy and environmental sensitivity of the Cloven Cliffs area could be compromised. At World's Edge, just south and east of Sugarloaf Mountain Road, a more suitable opportunity exists for public access.

KING TRACT

The King Tract is a 362-acre property that sits on the north slopes of Rumbling Bald. The tract is currently owned by The Nature Conservancy, and will eventually be transferred to the State of North Carolina to become part of Chimney Rock State Park. With the acquisition of the King Tract, The Nature Conservancy has increased natural resource protection around Rumbling Bald Mountain. Existing public access to the King Tract through park property is unavailable. Acquisition of additional property or easements across adjacent private property would be required to provide visitor access. In order for the King Tract to support future recreational activity, access should be planned in partnership with the Town of Lake Lure through the Weed Patch Mountain property.

WEED PATCH MOUNTAIN

Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy owns the 1,527-acre Weed Patch Mountain, a tract located north of Rumbling Bald. Weed Patch Mountain borders the northern edge of the King Tract and extends east toward Buffalo Creek Road. Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy has expressed interest in transferring ownership of Weed Patch Mountain to the State of North Carolina for its inclusion in Chimney Rock State Park. The conservation of Weed Patch Mountain protects views from Rumbling Bald. It also provides a conservation buffer for the northern part of Chimney Rock State Park.

Currently, no public access is available at Weed Patch Mountain. At the northern edge of Lake Lure, Buffalo Creek Road continues through a private neighborhood, extending north to the eastern boundary of property owned by the Town of Lake Lure. This property is adjacent to the southeastern corner of Weed Patch Mountain. The town has developed a vision for a future park which will include hiking trails, mountain biking trails, picnicking, and a small parking area. Working in partnership, the Town of Lake Lure and the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation could make public access to Weed Patch Mountain and the King Tract available through this property.



TRANSPORTATION IN THE HICKORY NUT GORGE

A large number of visitors currently travel to the Hickory Nut Gorge to visit Chimney Rock State Park, the Chimney Rock Village, and the Town of Lake Lure. The Hickory Nut Gorge experiences a substantial amount of vehicle traffic in peak season, and with the proposed park improvements, congestion and parking are anticipated to become an issue that will effect the entire region. This issue has become a growing concern for residents, visitors, and park staff. It is advantageous to plan now for a transit element so that when new park facilities are being implemented, a seamless integration can occur.



Overflow parking at the Meadows is full during peak season

PROPOSED PARK ENTRANCE ROAD

With the proposed park improvements at Chimney Rock State Park, there will inevitably be an increase in visitation. A shorter, more efficient route of travel into the core of the park will provide more time-efficient response for emergency, patrol, and fire response, and will help to mitigate vehicle congestion in the gorge. Significant improvements will be required to bring the existing park entrance road up to modern standards for two-way travel, including time and resources. Introducing a new park entrance road will not only support the Hickory Nut Gorge Transit System, it will become a corridor for bicycle and pedestrian access and accommodate the modernization of state park utilities such as water, sewer, electrical, and high speed telecommunications. With minor improvements, the existing entrance road will become a one-way egress road allowing for safer circulation into and out of the park.



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